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SUBJECT: MONTHLY POLITICAL ROUNDUP

REF: A. KIGALI 179
[B](#). KIGALI 166
[C](#). 2007 KIGALI 935

Classified By: CDA Cheryl J. Sim, reason 1.4 (B/D)

[1](#)1. (U) This edition of the monthly political roundup includes:

- High Council of the Press Releases Strategic Plan
- Annual Government of Rwanda (GOR) Retreat
- ICTR and GOR Sign Prisoner Accord
- Auditor General's Report Published
- 10th General Congress of Muslim Councils Meets

High Council of the Press Releases Strategic Plan

[1](#)2. (U) The Rwandan High Council of the Press (HCP) released its 2008-2012 Strategic Plan March 3 at a meeting with the diplomatic corps and other stakeholders. The structure of the HCP, consisting of a Board of Commissioners, an Executive Secretariat, a Regulation, Research and Media Development

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unit charged with media monitoring, legal affairs, and capacity building and an Administrative and Finance unit handling accounting, procurement, and information management, was outlined in the plan. The plan also listed four priorities of the HCP: guaranteeing the freedom of the press; installing a sustainable system of self-regulation; strengthening institutional capacity of the HCP; and strengthening the professionalism of the press.

[1](#)3. (U) The Ambassador attended the release, and offered several comments: he mentioned the inherent tension present in the HCP's role as both monitor and advocate for the media, and criticized the lack of judicial review of HCP actions; he suggested the HCP assert itself in cases in which journalists violate media standards and not leave action to the police. Finally, he reiterated the need for the draft media law to meet international standards.

[1](#)4. (U) Participants in the meeting, including independent journalists and the head of the National University of Rwanda's journalism school, expressed the need for the free flow of information in a democratic society as well as the

hope that the HCP be independent and a monitor of government officials' public statements as well as the media.

15. (SBU) Comment: It is perhaps telling that the Strategic Plan opens with a quotation from President Kagame attributing a lack of foreign direct investment in Africa to negative media stories, and calling for the media to "change the world for the better." The HCP's goals of strengthening and professionalizing the media are admirable, but its concurrent role in monitoring and, in some cases, disciplining the press remain troubling. End comment.

Annual GOR Retreat

16. (U) The GOR hosted its 5th annual government retreat at Akagera National Park February 28. The retreat, which was attended by the President, heads of Parliament, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Secretaries General, Rwandan Ambassadors, governors, top army and police officials, the Prosecutor General, the President of the High Court, and members of the Private Sector Federation, featured presentations on the economy, the role of the private sector, agriculture, land use and management, education, health and governance. A 6 percent growth in GDP in 2007 was highlighted during the retreat, but the lack of agriculture's contribution to that growth emerged as a primary concern. Other resolutions included developing strategies to address the high cost of building materials, to make Rwanda an ICT and financial hub, and to improve the education sector.

17. (C) Some participants were reportedly singled out for sharp criticism by President Kagame, including recently replaced Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MFA) Charles Murigande and of Public Service and Labor Prof. Manasseh Nshuti. Among Murigande's apparent infractions were the transmission of a diplomatic note of congratulations to Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki with the election still in doubt and without Kagame's approval, and the lack of coordination and information sharing between the MFA and the Rwandan National Security Service in Rwanda's embassies abroad. Murigande and Nshuti, roommates at the retreat, supposedly later apologized to Kagame for "complicating his job" by their actions. The Secretary General of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) denied these specific accounts, but told Pol/Econ Chief "everyone got criticized - that was what the meeting was for."

18. (SBU) Comment: The annual government retreat continues to serve as a forum to not only develop strategies but also for President Kagame to personally take members of his government to task. The recent cabinet reshuffle (ref A), coming so soon after the retreat, can be viewed as an outgrowth of this review process. End comment.

ICTR and GOR Sign Prisoner Accord

19. (U) On March 4, the GOR and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) signed an agreement allowing the transfer to Rwandan prisons of individuals previously convicted by the tribunal. ICTR Senior Legal Advisor Mohammed Ayat told PolOff that many NGOs misunderstand the distinction between the transfer of cases and the transfer of convicted prisoners -- the agreement was similar to those already in place in several other countries, and the transfer of prisoners "was not difficult." According to Ayat, the new Rwandan prison at Mpanga (built with Dutch funds) met minimum international standards.

Auditor General's Report Published

110. (U) The Office of the Auditor General of State Finances

released its latest annual report March 3, concluding that Rwf 5.3 billion of an overall budget of Rwf 404.7 billion had been expended without proper documentation. The report pointed to inadequate human resources, improper tendering practices, mismanagement of public funds, and alleged embezzlement as reasons for the unaccounted expenditures. Members of Parliament were quick to respond to the report, calling for intervention by the Office of the Prosecutor General. An investigative team was established in that office in 2007 to investigate the previous year's report, and Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga said responsible public officials would be held accountable for any impropriety.

¶11. (U) Comment: The amount of unaccounted funds is relatively small, less than 1.5 percent of Rwanda's total budget, and the official response has been swift and serious. Rwanda is strongly committed to fiscal transparency (refs A, C) but this report demonstrates how a lack of capacity and trained oversight can hinder effective financial accountability. End comment.

10th General Congress of Muslim Councils Meets

¶12. (U) The opening of the 10th General Congress of the Union of Muslim Councils for East, Central and Southern Africa (UMC) took place in Kigali on March 5, with the themes, "Building Councils Together" and "Faiths for a Safer Africa." The UMC meeting, created by Libyan President Colonel Muammar Gadhafi, featured speeches by President Kagame, Rwandan mufti and UMC Chairman Sheikh Saleh Habimana, and Secretary General of the World Islamic Call Society Dr. Muhammed Ahmed Sharif. In his remarks, Habimana described a good Muslim as "a good citizen of his city," and praised the Muslim contribution to the "rise of the sleeping giant, Africa." Sharif opened his speech by erroneously bringing "greetings to the people of Uganda," but then credited Rwandan Muslims with helping the country to make great strides after the 1994 genocide. President Kagame echoed these sentiments, outlining the role faith-based networks have in developing Rwanda's education, health, and environmental sectors. He called on religious practitioners to reject tendencies toward "bigotry and exclusivity" and highlighted the importance of education as a means to combat ignorance.

¶13. (U) Comment: It is generally acknowledged that most Muslims in Rwanda refused to participate in the 1994 genocide, their minority religious status trumping ethnic identities as Hutus, Tutsis or Twas. The Muslim community is, then, a natural partner of the government in its ongoing efforts at ethnic reconciliation and economic development. End comment.

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